Maori Women and the Politics of Tradition: What Roles and Power Did, Do, and Should Maori Women Exercise?

Caroline Ralston

Despite the number of Maori women who are playing leading roles in the contemporary Maori movement, certain Maori leaders, and Maori and Pakeha scholars, insist that Maori women did not in precontact times, and today do not and should not speak on *marae* (the open-air forecourt of a meeting house, on which formal welcomes and speeches are made at many major Maori meetings). Their position is supported in much of the academic literature. The effect of this prohibition is compounded by the contemporary belief of many Maori that women have an inimical influence in relation to matters of *tapu* significance and that for this reason they should be barred from all activities and places still considered by the Maori to be *tapu* today, for example, churches, graveyards, and *marae* forecourts.

The Politics of Tradition and of Representation

Early contact evidence concerning women and gender relations suggests that the claims of many present-day leaders and scholars have little basis in past history. How does one discuss the contradiction and present the early evidence without implying that Maori tradition as represented today is false? A people's representation of tradition evolves over time with some aspects emphasized and modified in new contexts, while others decline in importance, even slip into oblivion. (There is a burgeoning debate about the nature of tradition. See for example: Linnekin 1983, 1990, 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Babadzan 1988;

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Keesing 1989; Jolly 1992; Thomas 1992.) To judge a people's tradition as false or spurious presupposes a pristine body of tradition at some point in the past and the belief that such tradition can and should, if it is to be deemed legitimate, have moved unchanged into the present. Such objectivist hypotheses I find untenable. In this article I use a constructivist definition of tradition as "a conscious model of past lifeways" (Linnekin 1983, 241; Linnekin 1992).

Evidence concerning women and gender relations for the precontact and early contact period can be gleaned from foreign accounts and Maori mythology. Questions of representation of course persist. The early foreign accounts by explorers, missionaries, beachcombers, traders, and settlers do not reflect Maori reality directly, but are male Pakeha representations of Maori women's lives and motivations that I have selected and further interpreted. Acknowledging these problems, I will identify the foreign commentators on whom I rely, the interests that brought them to New Zealand, the districts they visited, and the length of time they spent there. Both their reliability as informants and my interpretation of their information are open to question and reevaluation. Similarly the mythological evidence, collected over the nineteenth century predominantly by Pakeha men, and which I can assess only through translation, is open to different interpretations. For all these reasons I present this piece as a personal interpretation, not an authoritative account. My interpretation is provisional: other interpretations are possible.

As well as these common problems of representation and authority and the familiar problems of Eurocentric and androcentric bias (Ralston 1988), the extant literature presents further difficulties. A large proportion of the material focuses on the Bay of Islands area, where the first missionaries settled in 1815 and early traders and whalers congregated in the 1820s. This regional bias privileges information about the Ngapuhi tribe who lived in the area, while leaving a paucity of evidence about other tribal groups. It is also crucial to recognize that the impact of new agricultural pursuits and new military and agricultural hardware on men's and women's lives in this area was significant from early in the contact period. When the missionaries ventured into tribal areas farther south in the 1830s, they met with Maori people eager to learn more about Pakeha skills and beliefs, and the missionary literature faithfully recorded the numbers of new pupils in their schools and new church attenders. Little or no space was given to describing the daily lives and practices of the people around

them, in contrast to the period in the Bay of Islands area, where the missionaries had had long years of waiting for the Maori to appreciate their skills and knowledge, and during which time some of them commented quite extensively on the daily activities of the local Maori.

Before turning to the early contact period, I shall explore the nature of the present-day contradiction a little further. Some exceptions to the prohibition on women from speaking on *marae* are widely accepted. Among the East Coast tribes of Ngati Porou, Ngati Kahungunu, and the Whanau-a-Apanui, female chiefs have enjoyed high status, and some of them have exercised substantial political power and the right to speak on their respective tribal *marae* (Mahuika 1981). More recently some scholars have presented evidence to suggest that chiefly women, from a much wider range of tribes than previously admitted, in earlier times exercised political rights and power that were much greater than is allowed for today (Webster 1975; Salmond 1988; Metge 1990). Similarly, theories of women's polluting qualities and the need to bar them from certain activities of *tapu* significance have been questioned by scholars arguing that rather than being inimical to *tapu* and abhorred by the gods, they were closely associated with the supernatural world and at particular times were imbued with supernatural potency (Hanson 1982; Hanson and Hanson 1983; Binney and Chaplin 1986, 24–28). Further, it has been argued that the word *noa* has been mistranslated as profane or polluting in opposition to *tapu*'s sacred quality. Rather, *noa* should be translated as free (as in a sky free of clouds) or clear (as in clear of restriction) (Hanson 1982; Thomas 1987; Ralston 1987, 1988).

These scholarly reconsiderations have had little impact on public opinion generally, and Maori women taking leading political or religious roles are still in some circumstances subject to arguments questioning the legitimacy of their involvement on the grounds that it is not traditional. Significant numbers of Maori women have been active on a national level since the early 1950s, with the establishment of the Maori Women's Welfare League, which sought improved conditions for Maori people in a wide range of areas. Since the 1970s women have been involved in and have led Waitangi Day protests and the Land March; they have promoted Maori language education and usage and diverse cultural programs; and they have been active in educational, health, housing, employment, and prison reforms. Some Maori women claim they have been at the forefront of the Maori movement (Szaszy, quoted in McTagget 1984), and both openly

and tacitly some Maori men have agreed (Reedy, quoted in McTagget 1984). Without highlighting the point, one male Maori academic listed five major Maori political actions between 1970 and 1978, three of which were led by women. Reviewing the period 1970 to 1985, the same academic discussed seven leading Maori activists, five of whom were women (Walker 1987, 13).

The type of criticism and questioning Maori women performing such roles can face, is exemplified in the following incident. In June 1990, Bishop Vercoe, the Maori bishop of Aotearoa, refused to attend the ordination of the first white female Anglican bishop, which occurred in Dunedin, claiming that Maoridom was not ready culturally to accept a woman as bishop. He was reported as saying that women did not in most tribes speak on *marae,* and most Maori did not accept women priests and would not allow women to speak in church (*Canberra Times,* 29 June 1990). Such public reiteration of these ideological positions I believe undermines those Maori women who are capable and willing and in many cases already exercising leadership roles.

It is not possible here to analyze current *marae* practice (see Salmond 1975; Tauroa and Tauroa 1986), but it is important to acknowledge women's presence there, the crucial role they play in calling guests onto the *marae* and farewelling them, and the means they have to criticize—and in certain instances regulate—what male orators say. To me it appears that older Maori women are content with what they see as the complementary nature of male and female responsibilities in *marae* ceremonial, and I have wondered if the concern about women's rights to speak on *marae* is just a Western feminist problem, a misunderstanding and mistranslation of a non-Western cultural activity? But some younger Maori women do seek speaking rights, while others avoid *marae* contexts where they know male speaking rights are insisted on. I am more concerned with the way the denial of rights to speak on the *marae* is extrapolated to a denial or questioning of women's rights to any leadership role in significant contemporary political, religious, and social affairs.

Maori Women's Lives, and Patterns of Gender Relations in the Early Contact Period

Obviously it is not possible to establish a complete or unequivocal picture of Maori women's lives or the pattern of gender relations from the evi-

dence available. Nothing comes directly from the women themselves. But it is clear that the early foreign commentators found Maori women independent, strong-minded, and leading politically, socially, and religiously active lives. Some examples from the literature establish this point. In 1814–1815 Samuel Marsden, founder of the first mission in the Bay of Islands, his traveling companion John L. Nicholas, and the first missionaries to settle in the area wrote of Rahu, senior wife of Ruatara, chief of the place called Rangihoua and a leading supporter of the missionary enterprise. Rahu was not chronologically Ruatara's first wife (Ballara 1990, 375–376). The widow of another chief, she came to him in about 1812, when he already had one wife, but because of her own personal chiefly status she was recognized as senior. Nicholas claimed she "was considered no less a personage than a queen by all the people within his [Ruatara's] territory" (1817, 1:177). Marsden gave Rahu an English dress, a present to her from his wife. At first she apparently wore it with pleasure, but in time she refused to be seen in it. Nicholas personally thought the dress became her ill, being too tight, and he believed she had been ridiculed by her own women about it (1817, 1:178, 319). Ruatara was displeased and thought that Rahu should at least wear the dress to church services, but she refused.

When the missionaries went ashore to negotiate the transfer of the mission party to Rangihoua with all its goods, Ruatara was absent supervising his many distant cultivations. Rahu received the missionaries and their wives cordially, discussed business, and offered them hospitality. Like many chiefly women met by itinerant missionaries in later years, Rahu had the right and responsibility to exercise *mana marae* 'the hospitality of the group' (Firth 1959, 124) on behalf of her husband and his people (Nicholas 1817, 1:192). Nicholas admired her weaving skills, at which she was very adept, but he was disconcerted that a woman of her status was involved in such an activity. On many occasions throughout Polynesia, Europeans voiced surprise, even shock, that Polynesian chiefs, both men and women, worked with their people in almost all major activities. European notions of rank and appropriate aristocratic behavior fitted ill with Polynesians' positive valuation of productive labor and their expectation that chiefs would be expert proponents of all significant skills, particularly carving, weaving, and house and canoe building.

Even more disconcerting to the Europeans was Rahu's participation in mock battles and *haka* 'vigorous posture dancing'.

> A number of women were in the heat of the action, amongst whom was Tippahee's old wife, not much less than seventy years of age and Duaterra's [Ruatara's] wife [Rahu] bearing in her hand a patoo about seven feet long, made out of the jawbone of a whale. This weapon she brandished about in the very centre of the battle, and went through all the various movements of the men, whether in retreating or advancing. (Elder 1932, 92)

Rahu's involvement on this and other occasions was by no means unusual. Right up to the 1840s foreigners were amazed to see women dancing *haka* and active in mock and sometimes real battles (Roux in Ollivier 1985, 197; Nicholas 1817, 1:199–200, 362, 364; 2:20–21; Clarke 1825, 443; Polack 1838, 1:1–82, 143; Polack 1840, 1:87; 2:4, 18; Saint John 1873, 26; Dieffenbach 1843, 2:125–126). On a long-distance canoe trip Rahu carefully placed her baby on the floor of the vessel and took up a paddle, which she used as dexterously and energetically as the men during the three-hour journey (Nicholas 1817, 1:321). Ruatara, who had been seriously ill when Marsden and Nicholas sailed for Sydney, died in March 1815, and Rahu subsequently hanged herself (Kendall, in Elder 1934, 76), as was customary for chiefly wives and some chiefly husbands on the death of their spouses (King, in Elder 1934, 254; D'Urville, in Sharp 1971, 34).

Within the whole range of data available, there seems to be no reason to assume that Rahu was in any way an exceptional chiefly woman. Her independence, the range of activities in which she was involved, her physical prowess, and her acknowledged status were not unique. Although it has not been recorded that Rahu supervised slaves working in gardens or worked there herself, there is evidence that for many chiefly women this was an accepted duty. A number of male chiefs explained to Marsden and Nicholas that they each required several wives to supervise slave labor in their respective gardens and to work there themselves to produce the required crops for daily subsistence and for sale to foreigners (Elder 1932, 113, 209; Nicholas 1817, 1:293).

Further fragmentary items from a range of times and places support the hypothesis that Maori women in the early contact period led active, participatory lives in the affairs of their kin. As in any society, Maori women were and are not a homogeneous group, and it is therefore important to recognize that chiefly women came to the notice of foreign observers and figure in myths more frequently than commoner women. However, the extant evidence does not suggest that commoner women were seen in their physical being as categorically different from their chiefly counterparts, or

more submissive or exploited. Although chiefly men and women engaged in all but the most menial of tasks, the commoners, men and women, and the slaves, carried the brunt of the arduous physical labor.

Savage, who was in the Bay of Islands area briefly in 1805, emphasized what he saw as the equal division of labor between Maori men and women:

> When speaking of the dexterity of the fishermen, I should have mentioned that of the fisherwomen also; for the women here are as expert at all the useful arts as the men, sharing equally the fatigue and the danger with them upon all occasions excepting war; in which though they undergo considerable fatigue, they do not participate in the danger. (Savage 1807, 59)

Presumably Savage was writing of the useful arts of subsistence, because many accounts from the early contact period clearly indicate a strict, although not absolute, sexual division of labor in such areas as wood carving, canoe and house building, weaving, and crafts.

In 1819 while on a second visit to the Bay of Islands, Samuel Marsden collected some information from two male Maori chiefs, Hongi and Te Morenga, about customs of warfare. They claimed that in the early phases of a battle if a chief's body fell into enemy hands, the enemy called out for his wife. If she were given up or gave herself up to the enemy, she was also killed. Both bodies were then placed before the enemy chiefs. The priest then commanded the chiefs to dress the body of the man for him, for his god. "The priestess, who is also an areekee [*ariki*] then gives the command to the wives of the chief to dress the woman for her god." The cooked bodies were eaten only by these chiefs or priests, who proclaimed whether the battle should proceed (Elder 1932, 173–174). The fragment is tantalizing. It suggests that male and female *tohunga* 'priests', who were also chiefs, played parallel roles in the worship of their respective male and female gods and participated jointly in major rites of public military and religious significance. Later in the nineteenth century there is evidence of women healers and revivalist leaders, and women prophets leading their kin groups into war (Porter 1974, 582; Colenso 1850, 663–665; Binney, Bassett, and Olssen 1990, 152; Best 1924, 1:240–242). The persistent appearance of women mediums, healers, and religious leaders throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite the widespread acceptance of Christianity, suggests that these were roles in precontact times that women were accustomed and expected to play.

During the same 1819 visit, Marsden walked across the peninsula from

the Bay of Islands to the Hokianga Harbour. On his return he was accompanied by more than fifty Maori who carried heavy loads of potatoes of one hundred pounds or more to exchange for axes and hoes available at the mission settlement in Rangihoua. Marsden had run out of these highly desired trade items during his journey, but undaunted the Maori undertook the round-trip of 100 to 140 miles to acquire them. A chief's wife was among the party, and she carried a load similar to all the rest (Elder 1932, 200).

Lesson, a Frenchman in the Bay of Islands area briefly in 1824, captured what I interpret as the tensions and contestations that had developed by that time between chiefly men and women in political and military affairs:

> Although in the eyes of these warlike islanders, women are only creatures of an inferior order, provided for the conservation of the species, they are nevertheless consulted in any serious situation, and the wife of an *ariki,* like a druidess of ancient times, shares her husband's priestly power. (Lesson, in Sharp 1971, 100)

By 1824 warfare had escalated dramatically with the introduction of European weaponry throughout the northern parts of the North Island of New Zealand. Given this greater emphasis on war, I would argue that an earlier complementarity between male and female chiefs well established in periods of longer term peace was being undermined by a predominantly masculine battle ethos and ethic. In nonmilitary matters women chiefs were still consulted and still could wield some influence, but perhaps to warrior chiefs their usefulness and roles were or should ideally be only biological.

On a more personal, commoner level, William Yate, a missionary with experience in the Bay of Islands and the Waikato during the 1820s and early 1830s, was perturbed by what he regarded as the unacceptable ways of Maori women as wives. Writing of a recent convert, he said that even before her conversion "she was still far from exhibiting those independent and lawless feelings which wives generally manifest towards their husbands in this savage land" (Yate 1835, 297). The mission agenda of domesticating Maori women into model, middle-class, Victorian wives and mothers underlies Yate's critique. It is clear from such statements that to male European eyes commoner women, like chiefly women, were not docile or submissive helpmates supporting husbands or male chiefly power without negotiating and questioning what was expected of them. Many foreign males reported, with varying degrees of surprise, the key

role both commoner and chiefly fathers played in the care of their young offspring, whom they carried on their backs wrapped in their cloaks in special harnesses for long periods each day (Cruise 1824, 276; Earle 1966, 186; Polack 1838, 1:374; Porter 1974, 65; Angas 1847, 1:33).

At Turanga near the East Cape in 1840, Jane Williams, a missionary wife and competent Maori speaker, overheard a group of chiefly women protesting the payment being offered in exchange for a piece of land that her husband, William Williams, was buying. "[O]ne of the ladies argue[d] very stoutly that a part of the payment ought to consist of gowns as they [the women] could not of course wear the trowsers & shirts." These chiefly women apparently were convinced they, as well as their menfolk, had rights in the land that had to be compensated. The final payment included 40 shirts, 40 pairs of trousers, and 4 gowns (Porter 1974, 82, 90). Probably it was all the gowns William Williams had available.

A final example illustrates both the position Maori women enjoyed in society and some of the changes that had occurred in their lives since contact with the West. Dieffenbach, an employee of the New Zealand Company, who had traveled extensively throughout the North Island of New Zealand and in the Cook Strait area of both North and South Islands between 1839 and 1841, considered that Maori women were treated with great consideration and kindness and enjoyed the full exercise of their free will, possessing what he saw as a remarkable influence in all the affairs of a tribe. However, he claimed they were burdened with all the heavy work in cultivating the crops, carrying wood and provisions from distant plantations, and bearing heavy loads during traveling excursions (Dieffenbach 1843, 2:11–12).

In precontact times fern root had been the staple food in most areas throughout the North Island. Men had been responsible for the heavy work of digging up the root, while women carried it back to the villages to prepare it (Polack 1838, 2:397; Firth 1959, 207). With the introduction of the easily cultivated and prolific European potato, women became the major cultivators of the new staple food, and fern root disappeared from Maori diets. At the same time the weeding of gardens, which was usually women's work and had been a relatively light task in precontact times, became very much more arduous and time-consuming with the advent of a number of noxious foreign weeds (Best 1976, 211). By the 1840s Maori women's agricultural work loads had clearly increased dramatically compared to precontact times.

The mythological evidence is more diffuse and intractable for a scholar unskilled in Maori language, and in the space available here it is not possible to do it full justice. In brief, images of strong women *(wahine toa)* abound as goddesses of fire, Mahuika, and supernatural powers, Muriranga-whenua (Kahukiwa and Grace 1984). Women could harness volcanic energy (Te Awekotuku 1991, 75), and in the great voyaging myths women brought the *kumara* with them or returned to Hawaiiki to collect it (Buck 1982, 61–62; Dieffenbach 1843, 2:47). After arrival in New Zealand, one of the great fleet canoes went adrift, but was paddled to safety by a woman (Karetu 1978, 71). Huritini and Hinemoa were and are renowned as fearless lovers who risked their lives to be with their men (Te Awekotuku 1991, 76–77), while the great women chiefs Tukutuku and Puhihuia are still remembered for their outstanding generosity and courtesy (Grey 1869, 333–364; White 1889, 4:154ff). There are both negative and positive portrayals of Hine-nui-te-po, who was the goddess of the underworld and also of conception and birth, but all portrayals acknowledge her power. Women in the myths and legends are not stereotyped negatively but rather appear as potent, independent actors.

Nowhere in the material available to me from mythological sources or early contact times did women appear constrained in their participation in many of the major activities of their kin groups. The missionary traveler Nicholas (1817, 2:109–111) and the trader Polack (1838, 1:231), who journeyed extensively in the northern North Island in the 1830s, revealed that chiefly women in Northland spoke on *marae,* and while in other areas there is no evidence to confirm or deny whether chiefly women had such rights, it is clear that women were widely consulted on matters of public significance and were present at major community activities, even wars. Unlike the Marquesas or Hawai'i, where early foreign observers were critical of the degrading (as they understood it) restrictions on women, who could not eat with men, travel in canoes, or attend most religious observances, in New Zealand no comment was made about prohibitions or restraints on Maori women, nor reference to beliefs of their profane or polluting nature. One observer, Crozet, in the Bay of Islands area very briefly in the 1770s, said that women did not eat with men (Roth 1891, 65), but many other accounts specifically mentioned that men and women ate together. Perhaps Crozet witnessed a temporary prohibition due to a particular circumstance or misunderstood information given to him?

Contrary to my initial expectation, I found that Maori women at the

time of early contact appeared to enjoy acknowledged status and power as chiefs, autonomy in much of their economic lives, and standing in their communities, a position in keeping with that of women in the rest of Polynesia. As this became clear to me I began systematically to re-read the anthropological accounts of the Maori to establish when and how the more negative images of Maori women, which have been appealed to at times over the past two decades as traditional lore, had evolved. The process was complex and did not reach its culmination until the 1970s. Starting with Best (1924) and running through to Heuer (1972), an increasingly negative view of Maori women was built up, as later authors cited earlier ones and the cogency of the argument appeared to be more and more thoroughly substantiated (Ralston 1991). Anthropologists were not alone responsible for the negative views of Maori women that have had wide currency throughout New Zealand in the second half of the twentieth century. Many factors were involved, not least the deprived material circumstances of the majority of Maori women during this period. Objective and subjective realities meshed with anthropological fashions, and the outcome for Maori women has been a persistent questioning of their right to leadership roles and an underlying fear that their participation in ritually significant ceremonies may endanger the general well-being of the group.

Maori Women and the Politics of Tradition

If one accepts that the largely Pakeha-derived evidence of women's early contact roles and responsibilities presents an approximately accurate picture, how can the prohibitions and questioning of contemporary women's involvement in a range of public activities, on the grounds of their being nontraditional, be viewed? As I have argued, to accuse the critics of Maori women's present-day commitments of being wrong or ignorant of tradition reifies the notion of tradition and suggests that one subscribes to the hypothesis that legitimate tradition is that body of beliefs and practices which has moved from precontact times to the present unchanged and uncontaminated. Several historians and social scientists (see for example Shils 1981), Western courts of law, and probably the majority of any Western population cling to such commonsense notions of tradition. More recently, however, the concept of tradition has been closely scrutinized by scholars and redefined as "a selective representation of the past, fashioned in the present, responsive to contemporary priorities and agendas, and

politically instrumental" (Linnekin 1992, 251). Such an immediate, contingent definition is more flexible and elusive than concrete notions of unchanged objectified tradition, which have long been acknowledged as appropriate and legitimate bases for claims of prior possession and ownership rights.

For Fourth World peoples such as the Maori, it is vital that they present a unique historical and cultural identity on which to base demands against an intrusive, hegemonic, foreign culture and government. But to construct a claim on the notion that that unique identity derives from a precontact past and has remained unchanged over the intervening two hundred years flies in the face of the evidence. In comparing data from early contact times with present-day formulations of tradition, questions of authenticity are unproductive. Rather than judge certain contemporary practices or beliefs false or spurious vis-à-vis a reconstruction of Maori life in early contact times, it is more appropriate to investigate the evolution of Maori culture and the gradual articulation of Maori tradition over the two-hundred-year contact period.

I have space to offer only a limited example of the sort of investigation that could be mounted. In circumstances involving negotiations with the Pakeha world, Maori people, and most particularly male Maori leaders have, since the 1920s, called on the concept of *Maoritanga* to generalize about Maori culture and explain it to outsiders. The history of the usage of the word *maoritanga* is illuminating. Its original definition, and one of the definitions still given today is "explanation or meaning" (Williams 1985). With a capital M, *Maoritanga* was coined by the Maori MP Sir James Carroll in 1920 when he urged Maori "to hold onto their Maoritanga." He did not elaborate further what he meant by *Maoritanga,* but Sir Apirana Ngata, another Maori MP and later to be the first Maori Native Minister, took up the term and defined it as

> an emphasis on . . . such Maori characteristics and such features of Maori culture as present day circumstances will permit, the inculcation of pride in Maori history and traditions, the retention so far as possible of old-time ceremonial, the continuous attempt to interpret the Maori point of view to the *pakeha* in power. (Ngata 1940, 176–177)

From a 1990s perspective this appears to be a very conservative formulation of *Maoritanga,* but for its time it was radical from some points of view. Certainly today *Maoritanga* is used in much more assertive ways,

when the term is used. But many Maori recognize that *Maoritanga* is of recent fabrication. It does not have the same depth of meaning or common usage as *Fa'a Samoa* 'the Samoan way' or *Faka Tonga* 'the Tongan way', terms that were current in their respective island groups before Western penetration. John Rangihau suggested only half jokingly that there was no such thing as *Maoritanga,* only *Arawatanga, Tainuitanga,* and so on based on the cultural practices of individual *iwi* 'tribes' (1981, 174). More recently Rose Pere has reiterated his argument (1987, 57–58). In precontact times, the concept *Maori,* as the indigenous people of Aotearoa, had no currency, and still today affiliation with *hapu* 'subtribal group' and *iwi* takes precedence.

Whether a call is made to *Maoritanga* or to a more specific and immediately experienced *"iwitanga"* (I have coined this word), it is important to recognize that these terms have been created and defined predominantly by men, based on their own experience and historical consciousness, and presumably to benefit their own agendas. I have found no evidence to date that women were a party to their formulation or were even consulted. Given the gendered nature of lived experience and history, whatever comes to be regarded as traditional will resonate with and affect men and women very differently. Many modern-day formulations of *Maoritanga* or *"iwitanga"* appear to me to discriminate against women and to seriously limit the roles and responsibilities they can legitimately take up.

Although the usage of terms such as *Maoritanga, Arawatanga,* or *Tainuitanga* can be historically and culturally contextualized, other key Maori practices can be similarly examined. *Hui* 'meeting' and *marae* culture have been elaborated and have gained increasing significance throughout the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s Ngata initiated a conscious and deliberate reform and rejuvenation of rural *marae* complexes. Elaborate meetinghouses with their attendant dining halls and cookhouses were built (Butterworth 1972, 170, 176), and since the 1950s urban *marae* have also been developed (Salmond 1975, 82–90). Inevitably new tools, new materials, and different structures have been used in these twentieth-century counterparts of buildings that were also found in precontact times. Iron roofs have replaced thatch, and the critical shortage of fresh water in many rural areas led Maori groups to collect rainwater from these new roofs in tanks to supply the *marae* complex, despite the concern that such water may have passed above chiefly heads, which were considered highly *tapu* (Salmond 1975, 55). On urban *marae, tapu* con-

cerns over cooking and sanitation, which led to several separate buildings on earlier *marae,* have been overcome, and multifunctional halls have been built (Salmond 1975, 35, 83).

More recent has been a growing recognition that greater numbers of young people need to be tempted to participate in *hui.* Where before there was little for the young to do except serve, watch, and learn, today sporting competitions and dances are frequently held in conjunction with major *hui* (Salmond 1975, 55, 92, 192, 198, 206–207). In some Tuhoe meetinghouses smoking is permitted, although formerly such houses were so *tapu* "even garments had to be removed if they had been in the presence of food" (Karetu 1978, 77). On many levels, adaptation and innovation of cultural norms for *hui* gatherings and *marae* ceremonial have occurred, but when women ask to speak, denial on the grounds of tradition is nearly always automatic. One surprising exception occurred in 1981 when the renowned Maori activist Eva Rickard stood as a candidate for the Mana Motuhake party for the seat of Western Maori in the national elections. While campaigning Rickard had avoided *marae* settings wherever possible because of their male-dominated protocols, but on Tauranganui *marae* an old man asked her to speak for herself, rather than have a man present her position. As Rickard said "That's the first time I knew of any woman who has talked on a Kingitangi *marae*" (*Broadsheet,* July–August 1982, 26). Clearly Maori men are not united in their stance on whether Maori women should or should not speak on *marae.* Some are prepared to contemplate change.

A more frequent male response, however, is exemplified by the Tuhoe traditionalist Sam Karetu (1978, 71) who explained the prohibition on women speaking as a necessary protection of the bearers of the next generation from insults, curses, or ridicule, the spoken word being accorded great potency in Maori culture. He went further to explain that "Women should never occupy the 'tara iti' and 'tara nui' positions, the corners of the [meeting] house immediately to the left and right of the door inside, as these are the places reserved for the main speakers of both sides." Men sit in relative comfort with their backs to the wall in Tuhoe meetinghouses. If there is room, women may do the same, but if not, they sit at the men's feet. "Similarly in a Tuhoe house, women may not hang any of their garments from the walls, but males may. Chauvinism? Not really, rather protection for any male who might inadvertently *demean* himself by lying

beneath the female aura—the head being the most *tapu* part of the anatomy" (Karetu 1978, 74–75, my emphasis).

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku of Te Arawa descent has questioned what she sees as the profound and oppressive misogyny of Karetu's position but she has recognized that among Te Arawa, a tribe that has most consistently and vehemently insisted that only men should speak on *marae,* women must also struggle to assert their rights to participation and respect (1991, 74). During the summer of 1977 a leading Te Arawa woman chief died, and her body lay inside a major meetinghouse. Guests arriving for her *tangi* experienced long waits in blazing heat. The women of the local Ngati Whakaue (a *hapu* within the Te Arawa *iwi*) suggested that the body should be moved onto the meetinghouse verandah adjacent to the *marae,* which would have opened up a larger ritual space. The men refused to consider such a move. Despite her high rank and the discomfort of the waiting guests, the body could not be allowed to lie on the verandah because, they argued, she was a woman. The incredulous women muttered greatly and voiced their discontent, but the men's decision held (Te Awekotuku 1991, 101–102).

On a second occasion the women succeeded in establishing their right to be present. Motutawa, a small historic island in Lake Rotokakahi, near Rotorua, had been used by Te Arawa people as a burial ground for several generations. For some time women had been forbidden to set foot on the island, because of their feared polluting qualities. The female relatives of a recently deceased person refused to accept the ruling and waited on the shore. "They argued that no calamity would occur, because women had frequented the island, even lived there at one time, and the current restriction was so recent it was suspect" (Te Awekotuku 1991, 102). Among the Te Arawa, the men's determination to monopolize certain spaces and activities does not go unchallenged by the women of the group. I wonder whether the Te Arawa men's insistence on their women's political and ritual subordination arises in part from insecurity because of the women's highly successful domination of the tour guide industry at Rotorua during much of the twentieth century?

Pressure on women not to speak on *marae* has occurred even among the Ngati Porou, one of the tribes renowned for its powerful and active female chiefs who have enjoyed speaking rights within their own tribal area. Anne Salmond reported that at an important Waikato funeral held several

years before the publication of her book in 1975 a young Ngati Porou chiefly woman had risen to speak during the visitors' speeches. The Waikato elders were outraged, as were most of the Ngati Porou male elders. They were preparing to leave when one male Ngati Porou elder rose and justified the woman's right to speak, tracing her descent, which at every point was superior to her male Waikato counterparts. She was allowed to speak, but the Ngati Porou elders were still loudly critical of her after the welcome was completed (Salmond 1975, 151). Only one Ngati Porou male was prepared to support his kinswoman; the rest seemed more concerned to honor other male *kawa* 'protocols'. The right of Ngati Porou women to speak on *marae,* either in their own tribal area or elsewhere, appears to be under threat. If one sees tradition as an objective entity that remains unchanged over extended periods, it would appear that a Ngati Porou tradition allowing women to speak on *marae* is perilously close to extinction. In the rubric of a cultural construction of tradition, it would appear that among the Ngati Porou, women's right to speak is being contested and renegotiated by Ngati Porou men to accord with their own present-day political ambitions.

Conclusion

I have offered a view of the independent, politically active, and participatory nature of women's lives in the early contact period, not in the vain belief that it constitutes a complete or tribally specific representation, nor that Maori women could today claim such as their legitimate right. Rather, I believe the data might provide an affirmation of what certain women in the past have done, as well as possible role models and counter instances to the negative portrayal of Maori women in much current anthropological literature. The data clearly reveal the impact of European intrusion on Maori women's lives in the early contact period, particularly their increased work loads, the developing masculine emphasis and ethos in the exercise of chiefly power with increased warfare, and the general devaluing of women's inputs into community life. During the colonial period since 1840 women's lives and expectations have been massively constrained and eroded, until in the second half of the twentieth century the negative portrayal of Maori women by anthropologists and others had a solid basis in contemporary reality.

In keeping with the changes in people's lives, key Maori concepts have

also changed. I have examined the evolution of the word *Maoritanga,* and *hui* and *marae* practice not to judge claims about tradition as spurious so much as to emphasize the changes that have occurred in key Maori beliefs and activities throughout the twentieth century. A recognition of these changes might allow the admission of changes that support women.

In the more immediate precontact period and throughout the two centuries of contact, the extent to which male dominance was expressed in ideology and practice varied regionally. Further, the tensions between a strongly established male-female complementarity, which allowed women much freedom and authority, and a militaristic masculine ideology of more far-reaching domination, worked out differently in different generations, depending on historical circumstances and the personal strengths of the individuals involved (I acknowledge my debt for the framework of this argument to Salmond 1988, 11). Put more simply, relations of power between the sexes have been contested arenas in the past and continue to be so today. To call on a concept of unchanging Maori or *iwi* tradition to keep women from speaking on *marae* and from more general leadership roles throughout society, or to prohibit their presence from places of *tapu* significance because of their believed inimical qualities vis-à-vis *tapu,* is to reify a notion of unchanging tradition that has not been imposed on other parts of Maori culture.

* * *

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Abstract

The central problem investigated here is the conflict between the predominant role that Maori women are playing in the contemporary Maori movement and the statements made by certain Maori and Pakeha scholars and Maori leaders that Maori women did not play leading roles in precontact times and should not today. The effect of these statements is compounded by the widespread Maori belief that women have an inimical influence in relation to matters of sacred significance. The meanings and usage of the term *tradition* are explored, and a brief view of typical attitudes confronted by Maori women activists today is presented. The significant, participatory activities of Maori women in community life in the early contact period are established using Pakeha evidence and, more briefly, mythological evidence is given to reveal similar roles for women in earlier periods. The impact on women's lives of precontact ideas about women's potent spiritual powers is also explored. Focus then turns to the changes that have occurred over the past one hundred fifty years in certain aspects of Maori life, in particular Maori definitions of Maoriness, the structures of Maori meetinghouses, and the protocols of various Maori gatherings. These changes have enhanced, not undermined, the legitimacy of the matters reviewed. In conclusion it is suggested that the flexibility and legitimacy accorded certain key features of Maori life in the years since contact could be extended to the roles that many contemporary Maori women have assumed.